

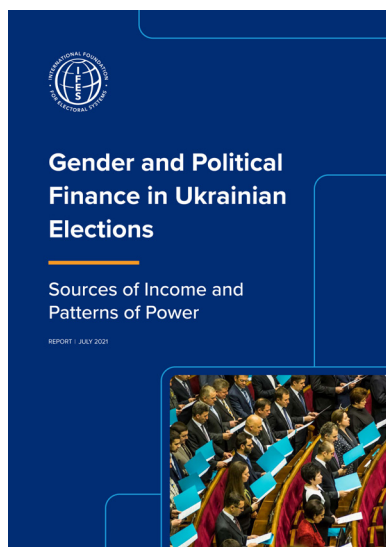


Gender and Political Finance in Ukrainian Elections

Sources of Income and Patterns of Power

REPORT | JULY 2021





Gender and Political Finance in Ukrainian Elections: Sources of Income and Patterns of Power

Women around the world face obstacles in running for political office, with access to financing playing a critical role. After the 2019 parliamentary elections in Ukraine, the number of women elected to Parliament increased significantly from 11 percent to over 20 percent. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), with analytical support from its partner Civic Movement Chesno, conducted research to see what role financing played in relation to gender during these elections, with a particular focus on single-member constituencies. *Gender and Political Finance in Ukrainian Elections: Sources of Income and Patterns of Power* relays key findings from this research and provides recommendations to further gender equality in relation to political finance in Ukraine.

Gender and Political Finance in Ukrainian Elections: Sources of Income and Patterns of Power
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Reached 205M+
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Worked in 145+
countries

Acknowledgments

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Angela Canterbury led the editing, design, production, publishing, communications and outreach on the report with team members Janine Duffy and Keaton Van Beveren.

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Executive Summary

The relationship between political finance and gender equality in Ukraine is complex, impacting all stages of the electoral process from candidate nomination to fundraising and election results.

Ukraine's 2019 parliamentary elections witnessed a historic increase in women's representation to 21 percent, from 12 percent in 2014. However, the significant increase in women parliamentarians is not necessarily due to political parties dramatically increasing the number of women they placed in winnable positions. Rather, it can be attributed to the landslide victory of the Servant of the People party, which enabled women who were not placed high on their lists to win seats. In the 2019 elections, women candidates still faced numerous obstacles in being nominated and accessing and spending campaign funds.

In general, women still struggle to attain winnable positions on party lists due to the widespread perception that they lack the financial resources to run their campaigns. In addition, the high cost of election campaigns makes it more difficult for candidates to run in single-member constituencies and may be particularly challenging for women due to inequalities in income and resources. Women may face greater challenges in raising funds from wealthy donors, as they often lack ties to the business community. They often appear to receive funding in smaller amounts than men; consequently, they need to find more donors to finance their campaigns — a time-consuming endeavor.

Using interviews and an analysis of submitted financial reports, this paper examines the relationship between gender and political finance in Ukraine. The research confirms many of the statements mentioned above in regard to women candidates in Ukraine's 2019 parliamentary elections, and it also reveals new insights. According to the financial reports that candidates submitted during the 2019 parliamentary elections, the average election fund of a woman candidate was approximately 20 percent smaller than that of men candidates, but the funding of women candidates from four of the top five parties were actually higher than those of men. This could be explained in a number of ways: Women candidates from those parties were simply better fundraisers, individual donors provided more support to women candidates or women candidates raised more funds out of a belief that they had to do so to compete effectively with men.

Self-funding of election campaigns was more common for men, while women relied predominantly on fundraising — in particular, on donations from individuals. This created additional obstacles for women candidates, as the donation procedures in the 2019 elections were cumbersome and often discouraged individual donors. Financial reports also indicated that women received significantly less campaign funding from businesses than did men. At the same time, due to the large number of individual donations they received, women from the parliamentary political parties received more funding overall. The research also showed differences in how men and women spent their funds. According to financial reports, men outspent women in general but, among the top five parties, women candidates spent more on average than men. In addition, women candidates tended to spend funds to produce campaign materials, while men focused more on purchasing advertising in the mass media. The higher

spending among women candidates from larger parties again could be explained by a need to overcome gender biases to compete with men on an equal footing.

Women candidates did not benefit from effective state oversight and equal application of rules to all contestants. State control of campaign finance regulations during the 2019 parliamentary elections can be characterized as technical; they did not result in the identification or punishment of gross campaign finance violations. This led to a general sense of impunity and might have favored men candidates, as they are more likely to have access to larger financial resources and the ability to spend these funds with little regard to existing limits.

This paper describes the close interlinking of political finance and gender equality in Ukraine. Given the complexity of the relationship, no single solution would resolve the barriers that women face in political financing and running for office. Rather, various stakeholders need to take measures that both enhance transparency and state oversight and create more incentives for women to run in elections. The paper concludes with recommendations for legal and behavioral reforms that could contribute to a more level playing field candidates of both genders.

Introduction



During the Communist era, gender equality was official policy in the Soviet Union, with gender quota mechanisms that provided for relatively high, though largely tokenistic, levels of women's representation in politics. In practice, women often had little political influence and were seen as inferior to men.¹ After Ukraine became independent, a massive gender gap in political influence became evident, with women making up only 2 percent of parliamentarians after the 1991 elections. Post-Soviet politics in Ukraine has largely been characterized by the involvement of oligarchs and opaque funding streams, in a way generally viewed as detrimental to the political participation of women.² With a significant influx of campaign cash in the early 1990s, Ukraine's largely symbolic temporary special measures failed to maintain high numbers of women in elected office. Since then, the cost of running for office in Ukraine — in combination with other socioeconomic and structural obstacles — has effectively priced women out of single-member constituencies.³

The situation in Ukraine is in line with the global experience that the high cost of seeking office is an obstacle to gender equality in elected positions,⁴ raising questions about how women and men raise money for their campaign activities. This paper analyzes similarities and differences in how women and men in Ukraine raised funds for the 2019 parliamentary election campaigns, and the interaction between these practices and gender equality in Ukrainian electoral politics.

The analysis is based on 15 interviews with women and men who ran in the 2019 parliamentary elections for different political parties or as independents, party representatives involved in the candidate selection process, and experts on the Ukrainian political process and gender equality (eight respondents were women).⁵ The authors also drew from an analysis by Civic Movement Chesno of financial statements that candidates submitted after the elections and reviewed the limited existing literature.

Theoretical Framework

In Ukraine and globally, gendered inequalities in political representation stem from an interplay between power, structural inequalities between women and men, societal perceptions regarding gendered roles and a host of socioeconomic factors and history.⁶

Access to funding is generally recognized as an important factor in winning elections, a fact that has a fundamental impact on gender equality in politics.⁷ In many countries, the evidence indicates that campaign costs are largely covered by what candidates raise themselves, rather than funding by their political party.⁸ Hence, it is essential to study how women and men raise funds for elections. Studies note that women “are forced to rely heavily on a variety of indirect economic sources [such as unpaid work⁹] due to their more limited access to financial resources.”¹⁰ In particular, women “are less likely to be linked to business and professional networks which can provide financial resources and expertise.”¹¹ In countries such as Ukraine, where the business community is largely dominated by men, and wealthy donors play a significant role in politics, the gendered impacts of business connections tie directly to political representation. In addition, the overall financial gap between women and men in many countries indicates that women are less likely to have access to personal funds to finance a political career.¹²

The literature includes findings concerning gender equality and spending on election campaigns. While campaign spending is not the only factor for electoral success, many scholars note the importance of spending in winning elections.¹³ While research from established democracies is inconclusive regarding relative spending by women and men candidates,¹⁴ most studies from other regions describe lower spending by women.¹⁵ In addition, several scholars argue that there is a “need for women to outspend men in an effort to counteract male incumbency or overcome negative perceptions about women’s potential to act as effective politicians.”¹⁶

This paper studies whether the gender differences in fundraising noted in global literature were also apparent for candidates in the Ukrainian 2019 parliamentary elections. It also considers how such differences may affect the electoral opportunities of women aspirants and candidates in Ukraine. As one study emphasizes, “potential women candidates may find it more difficult to persuade political parties to nominate them if male competitors with wealthy contacts can provide much larger funding amounts to the campaign of the party.”¹⁷

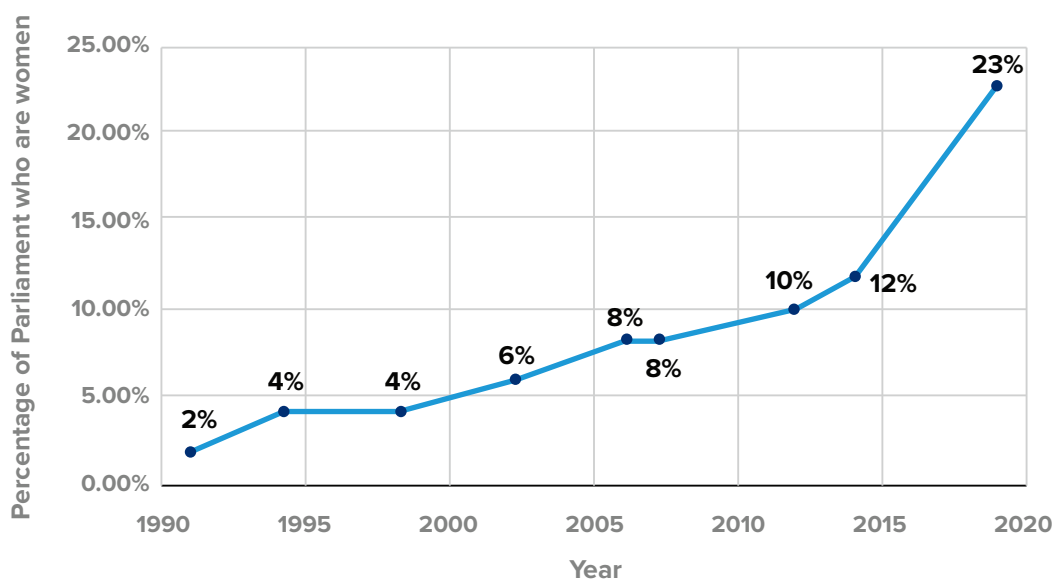
Background

Ukraine presents somewhat of a paradox regarding the participation of women in politics, which makes it a particularly interesting case to study. From 2014 through the 2019 elections, the country had the fewest women parliamentarians in Europe, hovering between 11 percent and 12 percent. However, Ukrainian voters generally do not see a candidate's gender as relevant to their voting choice, a view expressed by 64 percent of respondents to a 2019 survey.¹⁸ Gender inequality is seen, though, in the financial situation, as the gap in income between women and men in Ukraine is "much larger than the average [European Union] pay gap."¹⁹

The 2019 parliamentary elections were of historical significance in Ukraine. As only the second parliamentary elections after the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, they were seen as a chance for the public to judge progress on critical reforms promised during the revolution. Of the promised reforms, the electorate continued to consider political and campaign finance control of significant importance. In a post-parliamentary election public opinion survey conducted by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in September 2019, a majority of Ukrainians (53 percent) said that receiving information regarding the financing of parties and candidates is important when making an electoral choice. In addition, members of the Ukrainian public increasingly stated their support for gender equality measures in elections.²⁰

Despite current public support for gender equality measures, women have consistently been underrepresented in national office. After independence in 1991, the number of women in the *Verkhovna Rada (Rada)* rose slowly, although only 12 percent of parliamentarians were women prior to the 2019 elections (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Representation of Women in Parliament, 1991-2019²¹



From 2012 to 2019, half of Rada members were elected from single-member constituencies (SMCs) using a majoritarian system, with the other half elected through closed party lists. With the 2019 elections, women's representation increased considerably to 21 percent. However, a significant discrepancy exists between the SMCs and the party lists. While 60 women were elected through closed party lists in 2019, only 27 were elected from SMCs. "Elections in single-member districts [in Ukraine] represent a major obstacle for women to access the upper echelons of power due to their high cost and some other factors,"²² with women receiving 54 percent less funding overall in 2019 for SMC seats.²³ Twenty-one of the women elected in SMCs ran as candidates of the Servant of the People party (Sluha Narodu, or SN). One of those candidates noted in an interview, "The nomination by the party was a key to my success, and the same was true for other candidates nominated by [SN]. Many of us had very low recognition, but we were able to win confidently due to our association with President Zelenskyy and his party." Of the parties that met the 5 percent vote threshold for seat allocation, only SN and Holos ran successful women candidates in SMCs.²⁴The table below shows the breakdown of members of Parliament (MPs) by gender and party.

Figure 2. Breakdown of Members of Parliament by Gender and Party

Political Party	Number of MPs			Total	Women MPs Disaggregated by Party List and SMC	
	Women	Men	Percentage of MPs		Party List	SMC
Political Party	55	199	21.6%	254	34	21
Opposition Platform — for Life (OPFL)	5	38	11.6%	43	5	0
Batkivshchyna	5	21	19.2%	26	5	0
European Solidarity	9	16	36.0%	25	9	0
Holos	9	11	45.0%	20	7	2
<i>Parties that did not meet the 5% threshold</i>	2	8	20.0%	10	-	2
<i>Self-nominated candidates</i>	2	44	4.3%	46	-	2
Total	87	337	20.5%	424	59	27

While some important political finance reforms took place after the 2014 elections, including the passage of a progressive 2015 political finance law, it is difficult to attribute the increased representation by women to any one factor. The significant increase in women MPs in 2019 could be attributed at least in part to the landslide victory of SN, which President Volodymyr Zelenskyy established only a few months before the elections. This rejection of the "old guard" and incumbents, with 76 percent of parliamentarians taking national office for the first time, led to a large number of candidates from the SN party list winning seats in Parliament.

Given the massive popularity of SN and the rejection of most incumbent politicians (88 percent of them men), the increase in women parliamentarians is not necessarily attributable to a shift in attitudes about women's leadership. Rather, it could be due to the popularity of a single party, which gained such a large proportion of seats that the placement of women on its list was less important. Notably, voters did not

demonstrate bias against women by changing their party preference to lists that included fewer women; nor did they vote for women party members for SMC seats. Therefore, the significant increase in the electoral representation of women does not reduce the need to carefully analyze the challenges that women face in winning office, including the importance of political finance, particularly as Ukraine still lags behind regional and global averages for women's representation in elected office. The analysis will show that financial considerations played an important, although complicated, role in the experience of women political aspirants.

Funding of 2019 *Rada* Candidates

In a mild understatement, Karl-Heinz Nassmacher noted that “[m]any will agree that money is an important resource in politics.”²⁵ The financial inequalities that women face, leading to comparatively limited access to financing, is often noted as a significant challenge as they compete in elections.²⁶

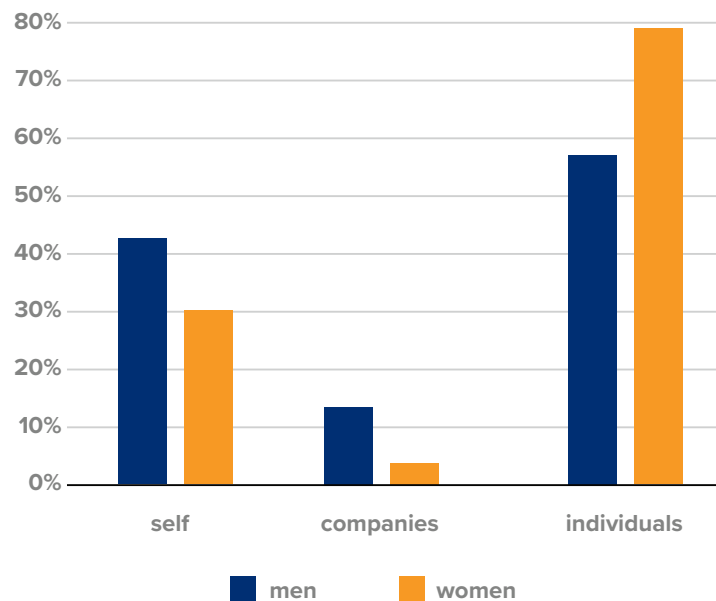
In Ukraine, the ability to raise funds (with an important exception due to SN’s massive popularity in the 2019 parliamentary election) remains key to successful campaigning, which can be exceedingly costly due to mass media advertising. Ukrainian gender and political finance expert Yuliia Siedaiia noted that “(raising funds) is immensely important. ... Very often, media technologies are used to increase a candidate’s visibility; our society is not yet ready for door-to-door campaigning.” While both men and women lack access to party funds, the impact on women can be much more significant, as they generally have less income, less wealth and fewer connections to the business community, therefore requiring active fundraising at the local and individual levels.

While some Ukrainian political parties provide support through volunteers or materials such as posters or tee-shirts, SMC candidates generally must raise funds from individuals (including their families), businesses or their own savings. In most cases when political parties cover the cost of a candidate’s deposit, they make no further contributions to that campaign. None of the candidates or party representatives interviewed mentioned internal party measures to cover deposits to support the candidacy of more women.

Based on formally submitted reports (which may not be reliable due to a lack of comprehensive review or oversight), the average election funds of women candidates were approximately 20 percent smaller than those of men, with an even larger discrepancy for self-nominated candidates.²⁷ The 2,030 reports submitted by candidates indicate that the average amount received by men was 250,000 Ukrainian Hryvnia (UAH) compared to UAH 206,000 for women.²⁸ The 2019 analysis from the Ukrainian Women’s Fund highlighted that “a significant gender gap in size of the election funds was observed among self-nominated men and women candidates in SMCs. On average, the election fund of a self-nominated woman candidate was smaller by 54 percent.”²⁹

Ukrainian elections, like those in most countries, include many political parties and candidates with little or no chance of electoral success. While, overall, the average election funds of all women candidates was lower than those of men candidates, analyzing candidates of both genders from the top five parties — those who reached the party list threshold — tells a different story.³⁰ For the largest parties, the situation is entirely different than for smaller parties. Other than for OPFL, women had significantly higher campaign incomes than men across the board (combining self-funding and donations from companies and individuals).³¹ Women candidates in the top five parties received on average UAH 405,000 compared to UAH 331,000 for men. From the top five parties, women made up approximately 17 percent of candidates who submitted financial reports, which showed that they raised more than 20 percent of the overall funding. The sources of funding, which will be examined in further sections, varies greatly between the genders (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Sources of Campaign Income for SMC Candidates From Larger Parties³²



There could be several reasons for women reporting receipt of larger amounts of campaign funds. For example, the discrepancy could be explained by a gendered difference in the honesty of reporting by candidates. Several women interviewed noted the pressure they felt to prove themselves and succeed. Incumbent women MPs noted that they consistently felt they must be “more prepared than their male counterparts.”³³ While women from the top five parties raised more per person than men, this was not necessarily the case among candidates from smaller and less successful parties. Women from a range of parties expressed discomfort with fundraising for their campaigns, even if they were successful. For example, when women were selected as candidates by large parties with public support, those candidates were often more effective fundraisers than men from the same party.

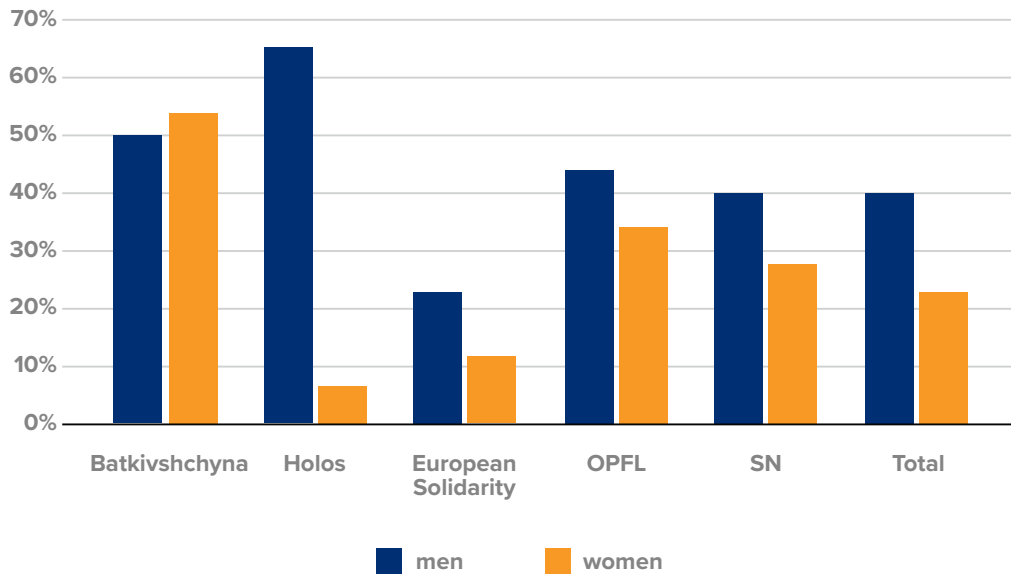
“ In general, women face more challenges in political life and [the] entry threshold is higher for women ... therefore, men hold more positions than women.” — Woman candidate interviewed for this assessment

Self-Funding

Candidates who receive little funding from the political party that nominated them must raise funds on their own. A logical first consideration is how much of their own money candidates can devote to the campaign. In this area, women are often at a disadvantage, as their personal wealth is lower than that of men in most countries,³⁴ and “self-financing is often a major obstacle for women in particular.”³⁵ A complementary challenge is that women are often expected to use their resources to cover household expenses, while the same expectation does not necessarily apply for men.³⁶

Officially submitted financial reports reflect self-funding in Ukrainian election campaigns.³⁷ During the 2019 parliamentary elections, men spent significantly more of their own money on their campaigns, while women relied significantly more on fundraising, mainly from individuals: “On average, own donations by a man candidate constituted 45% of (his) election fund, while own financial resources of a woman candidate constituted 27% of her election fund.”³⁸ Reports submitted by SMC candidates from the five parties that met the 5 percent threshold show large differences in the self-funding of men’s and women’s campaigns (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Share of Self-Funding of the Campaign of Women and Men SMC Candidates



On average, a woman candidate used UAH 92,000 of her own money for her campaign, compared to UAH 133,000 for men (23 percent and 40 percent, respectively, of their overall funding). Other than the Batkivshchyna party, whose women candidates utilized more of their own funding (UAH 103,000 on average, compared to UAH 79,000 UAH for men), men candidates from the other top parties funded a significantly higher percentage of their campaigns from their own resources and donated significantly more than women to their own campaigns. Donations by SN candidates, for example, averaged UAH 224,000 by men compared to UAH 171,000 by women.

Women candidates either do not have the financial resources to self-fund their campaigns or choose not to allocate their funds for this purpose. Perhaps men are more willing to self-fund their campaigns, either because they view doing so as a reasonable, calculated risk or because they have more savings generally.³⁹ It is relevant to note that the 2018 gender wage gap in Ukraine was 22 percent overall, reaching 40 percent in some sectors.⁴⁰ All of the candidates interviewed noted that they spent their own money, with amounts slightly higher for men candidates. One successful candidate stated that he used his own savings exclusively and did not raise funds at all.

Donations From Companies

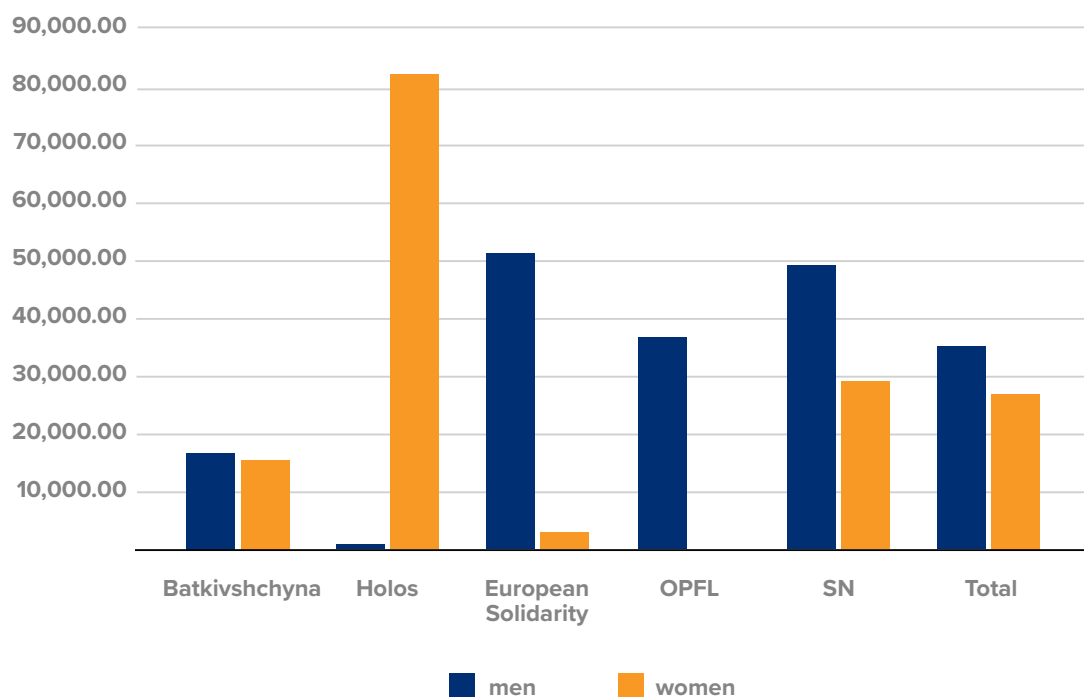
The literature on political finance and gender equality often refers to women candidates' limited access to the business sector.⁴¹ In Ukraine, very few women occupy leading positions in business; these networks are dominated by men and tend to support men candidates.⁴² A man candidate interviewed for this study argued that "it is easier for a man to discuss and handle financial issues with another man." This perception has important ramifications for fundraising. Connections to — and funds raised from — the business community play a particular role in purchasing airtime for advertising — a significant percentage of costs for successful campaigns in Ukraine.

This lack of company funding for women candidates is reflected in official reports. While data from financial reports by SMC candidates from the five main political parties indicates that women on average received more donations from companies than men, 81 percent (UAH 5,082,000) of such funds raised by SMC women candidates was generated by only a few Holos candidates, and a majority was raised by a single woman. Disregarding Holos candidates, the average woman candidate received approximately UAH

15,000 compared to UAH 38,000 donated to men — on average, less than 30 percent of overall funding from companies and the business community. Figure 5 shows the percentage of a candidate’s campaign funded by company

donations to candidates in the top five parties); the one woman candidate from Holos who received UAH 3.6 million in company donations has been removed as a significant outlier.

Figure 5. Average Amount of Donations Received From Companies per Candidate (UAH)



SN ran the most successful women candidates in SMCs; they received on average only 60 percent of the corporate funding that men from the party received. Women candidates from OPFL did not receive any company donations, but its men candidates garnered more contributions than women from the even more popular SN. The average gap in donations per candidate was similarly high for European Solidarity, with women receiving only 6 percent of what men from the same party gained. The Batkivshschyna party saw the smallest discrepancy, with women receiving 93 percent of what men received; however, Batkivshschyna also saw the lowest amount of company donations for men overall. This data demonstrates that even in the most successful parties, either businesses

tended to support men over women, or men were more successful in obtaining campaign donations from these largely male-dominated networks. One woman candidate noted, “Men candidates have more financial resources because they usually come from business community.” Several other interviewees echoed this observation.

In addition to being more likely to have the business support to purchase mass media advertisements and airtime, men are much more likely to benefit from unearned media. In its media analyses of the Ukrainian parliamentary elections, the Council of Europe found that men not only dominated prime-time coverage, but men candidates were much more likely to be invited as talk show guests and panelists.

“ Men were given overwhelmingly more prime time — 80 per cent — on the national TV channels compared to women, while women — only 11 per cent ... Representation of women on talk shows, both parliamentary candidates and experts, remained extremely low. For example, women guested 82 times on all talk shows, whereas men — 392 times. Many talk shows aired on various TV channels featured only male guests.”⁴³

This bias amounts to a massive inequality in funds needed for effective campaigning that is in no way reflected in the official reports that candidates submitted.

The system of subventions for socioeconomic development, whereby the Cabinet of Ministers distributes state funds to SMC MPs for use in their home constituencies, has also advantaged incumbent men over female counterparts. With so few women MPs from SMCs in the *Rada* from 2014 to 2019, this funding predominantly went to men MPs. An analysis by the United Nations Development Programme found that “out of 49 female *Verkhovna Rada* deputies, only four benefited from subventions in 2017, amounting to only 1.4 per cent of the total disbursed.”⁴⁴ These subventions can affect the perceived effectiveness of MPs in delivering on campaign promises, particularly in the run-up to an election.

Donations From Individuals

Without connections to the business community or party funding, women candidates largely rely on small donations, including family support. One elected woman official interviewed for this paper argued that it is “more difficult for women to find donors.” In addition, there is a perception that women receive funding in smaller amounts than men and therefore need significantly more donors to match men’s fundraising efforts. This may be due in part to more general gendered income inequalities. If men are connected largely to other men, they may have access to more potential funding per person. Similarly, if women solicit funds from other women, the total potential funding may be lower due to the income gap and higher unemployment of Ukrainian women.

This need to find more donors is time-consuming, a finding in line with the argument elsewhere that women’s “... campaign contributions tend to be smaller, which means they need to campaign harder to reach a broader base of donors to achieve funding parity with male colleagues.”⁴⁵ With women still largely responsible for family care and unpaid labor at home, their time is limited. Balancing home and family responsibilities has the greatest impact on women from lower income brackets who cannot afford child care or paid help at home. One woman candidate interviewed for this study noted:

“ Women who engage in politics should still take care of their family and be responsible for daily chores at the same time. In my case, I lived with a woman [internally displaced person] who had nowhere to live, and we supported each other — she took care of my child and lived in my place for free. Otherwise, I guess I haven’t had a possibility to join politics and combine it with family obligations because I didn’t have enough money to pay a babysitter.”

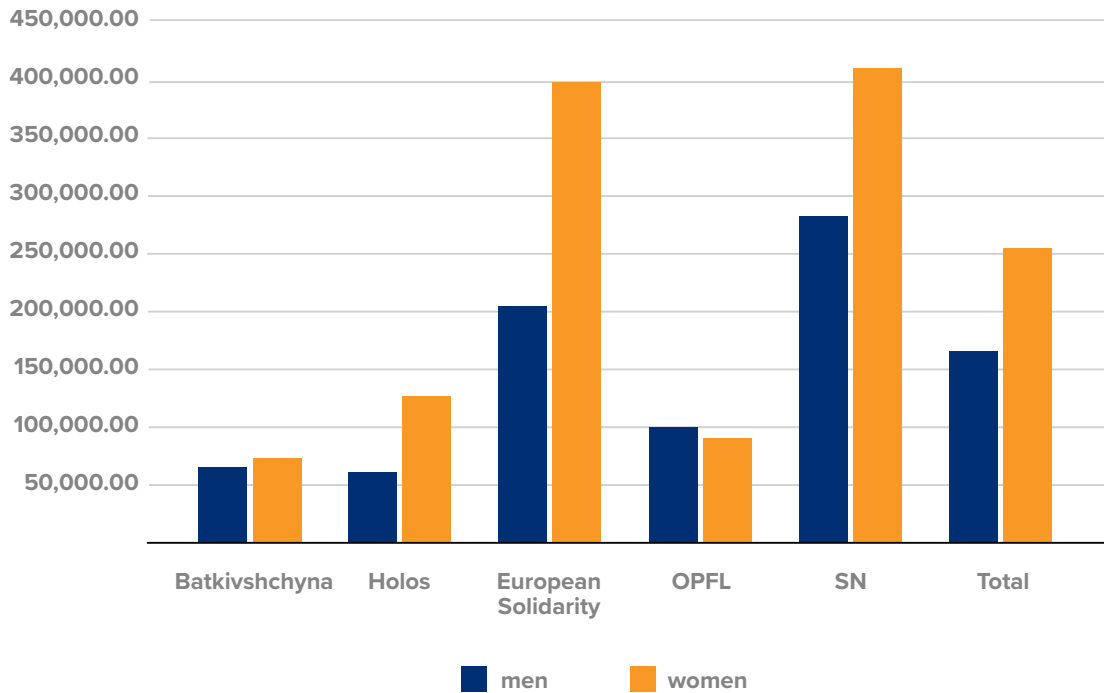
Another woman candidate similarly noted that “a woman usually is responsible for planning the time

for herself and for children, while a man plans only his own time.”⁴⁶

The analysis of submitted financial reports shows that women received significantly more

funds through donations from individuals than men did. Women candidates in all the other main parties except OPFL raised significantly more per candidate from individuals than men (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Average Amount of Donations Received from Individuals per Candidate (UAH)



On average, women candidates from the top five parties raised UAH 250,000 in donations from individuals, compared to UAH 162,000 for men (62 percent and 49 percent of overall funding, respectively). However, accounting for all political parties and self-nominated candidates, the number drops significantly, with men raising slightly more on average than women candidates (UAH 115,000 compared to UAH 113,000 for women). Of those interviewed, women were much more likely to speak about donations from supporters, while men were more likely to speak about spending their own savings. One unsuccessful woman candidate considered donations from individuals as resulting from the fact that women candidates “focus more on personal communication and pay more attention to the personal needs of vulnerable and underrepresented groups.”

If women candidates are more likely to rely on donations from individuals than men, who have

access to their own funding or business donations, they are also most likely to experience issues in receiving those donations — a process that, until 2020, was complex and cumbersome for individual supporters. Individuals had to visit a bank to transfer money to a candidate’s campaign account and sign a donation statement. After the amendments to the party law and the recently adopted Election Code came into force in January and July 2020, respectively, individuals can donate electronically to ordinary party accounts and campaign accounts in national elections. However, the new system has not yet been tested in national elections.

The above analysis is based on financial statements submitted by candidates after the elections; caution is required in interpreting these figures. Large donations from oligarchs to individual candidates or political factions are unlikely to be included, as candidates and political parties would not want those connections to be made public.

Campaign Spending

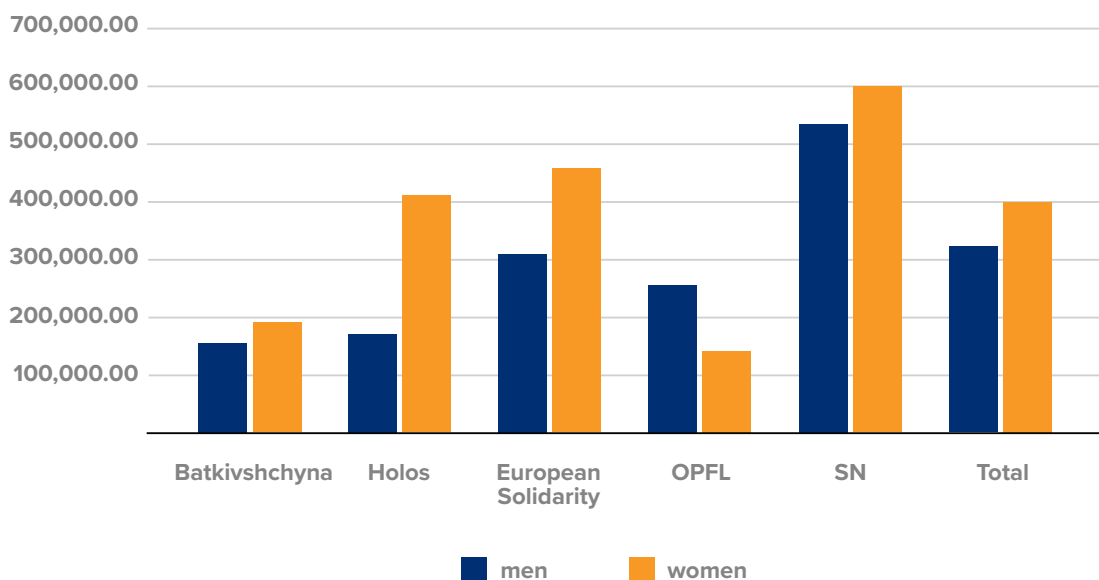
While this paper focuses mainly on how women and men raised funds for their campaigns, it is also important to look at their spending patterns. Research into gendered campaign spending has found different results, with higher spending seen for women but in some cases noting a need for women to spend more to persuade a reluctant electorate.⁴⁷

Just as significant gender differences have been found in sources of campaign income, there appear to be differences in how women and men

candidates spent the funds raised during the campaign. Financial statements indicate that men outspent women overall — an unsurprising finding, considering that this group of candidates saw men raise more than women did. On average per candidate, men spent UAH 243,000 compared to women’s expenditures of UAH 196,000.

However, these numbers shift when considering only the five main parties. Except OPFL (which was also the only party whose women candidates did not raise more than men), all the top parties showed significantly higher average expenditures by women candidates (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Average Campaign Expenditures per Candidate (UAH)



The successful women candidates from SN and Holos, the two parties that met the 5 percent threshold, spent (and raised) more on average than men from the same parties. For SN, whose candidates benefited significantly from the extreme popularity of their party and President Zelenskyy (making it difficult to separate the success of individual candidates from that of the party), women candidates in SMCs spent an average of UAH 600,000 compared to UAH 535,000 for men. Holos, which had two successful women candidates in SMCs, saw an even larger discrepancy: Women candidates spent UAH 408,000 on average compared to men’s spending of UAH 171,000.

In addition to official reports indicating that these successful women candidates generally spent

more, it seems that they also spent their funding *differently*. An analysis by the Ukrainian Women’s Fund found, “among elected MPs, on average women candidates spent [the] major part from the election fund for the production of campaign materials, while men candidates spent most of the funds for mass media.”⁴⁸

This difference could be due to a number of factors. Women might have relied more on individual interactions with donors than men to win support. Alternatively, it could mean that women either did not trust the use of mass media for their campaigns or were not able to purchase advertisements, perhaps due to a lack of connections with major media outlets. During an interview for this paper, Ukrainian gender and political finance expert Yuliia Siedaia posited that women must spend

more money before a campaign to overcome gender-based obstacles that impact their visibility and popularity. During the presidential and parliamentary campaigns, domestic and international observation missions highlighted the prevalence of sexist and homophobic content on television and billboards and in public events and, to an extreme extent, on social media.⁴⁹ While online abuse impacted candidates of both genders, women were specifically targeted using sexually violent language and language that questioned their competence and professionalism.⁵⁰

With the high saturation of sexist content and an organized “anti-gender” movement publicly messaging against gender equality and feminist principles, it very well may be that successful women candidates feel they must raise and spend more money for their campaigns to counter this messaging, raise their profiles and demonstrate publicly that women can be — and are — leaders in Ukraine. One unsuccessful woman candidate interviewed for this paper noted that “women need to spend more than men to get equal opportunities and chances,” while Yuliia Siedaia stated in an interview that her research showed:

“In general, women spend more funds than men because women are often less visible. Men do not spend so much on external advertising, for example, due to higher popularity and visibility. A woman has to make an impression and create an image to prove that she has a right to join politics and represent the interests of a certain group. All women reported that this requires more funds. If a woman wants to engage mass media as a tool to increase her visibility she has to deliver her messages a few times to stick in voters’ memory, and this is quite expensive.”

Oversight

The state's ability to enforce rules related to raising and spending funds for campaigning and the submission of financial reports is seen as a key to ensuring the transparency and integrity of campaign finance. That said, in many countries oversight is often the weakest link in political finance frameworks.⁵¹ Ukraine is no exception, and control over compliance with political finance rules has been undermined by legal inconsistencies, gaps in cooperation between oversight agencies, and insufficient monitoring and enforcement capabilities of the latter.

Ukraine's campaign finance oversight mandate is divided between the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the National Agency on Corruption Prevention (NACP). For the 2019 parliamentary elections, candidates submitted financial reports to both. The CEC had the right to analyze campaign finance reports and control the use of funds for campaigning, while the NACP was tasked with overseeing the parties' and candidates' general compliance with campaign finance rules. However, both institutions lacked the resources and instruments to perform deep analyses of how candidates raised and spent funds for campaigning or to identify serious violations. For instance, according to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Election Observation Mission Final Report, "the CEC informed that it is not required to identify unreported incomes and expenditures, which does not ensure meaningful oversight."⁵²

Party representatives and candidates interviewed for this paper generally denied any gendered impact in how the rules are applied to contestants. A successful man candidate stated, "regulations related to campaign finance limits and donations do not have gender disaggregation and bring neither advantage nor disadvantage for men and women," while an unsuccessful woman agreed that "these are general rules, and there is no difference between men and women." Yet, when asked what requirements would improve gender equality in Ukrainian elections, some interviewees cited the importance of effective enforcement of the rules on raising and spending funds. A successful woman from a party list said it would be useful "to establish clear rules in election races for all contestants as well as to introduce sanctions for failure to comply with these rules to ensure a level playing field."

It is difficult to establish a clear and direct link between effective oversight in campaign finance and equality of opportunities for men and women candidates. However, weak enforcement of the rules and the resulting impunity for perpetrators obviously undermines fair competition, especially for candidates with fewer resources. If gross violations of rules on campaign donations and expenses are permitted, candidates with more resources and stronger ties to big business can exploit loopholes to gain unfair advantages over their less affluent competitors.

Some interviewed candidates indirectly echoed this sentiment. One unsuccessful woman noted, "I would say that I didn't have [enough] financial resources to be able to exceed campaign spending limits. These rules are more relevant for affluent candidates, and I had no time to follow this aspect." Since men candidates are usually more well-off due to gendered economic inequalities, and rules and limitations are easy to circumvent, women could suffer disproportionately from poor oversight. While poor enforcement of rules might not damage women candidates directly, it creates opportunities for generally richer men to receive additional benefits from their larger pools of campaign resources.

Perceptions of Political Parties and Candidate Nomination

This paper largely addresses the ways that women and men in Ukraine raised (and spent) funds for their 2019 parliamentary campaigns. Having reviewed the ways they financed their campaigns, we now add another crucial actor in Ukrainian politics — the political party. In countries where political parties dominate electoral politics, “political parties are the gatekeepers to women’s political participation.”⁵³ Even if a party has a stated commitment to gender equality, “political party leaders are unlikely to alter their candidate selection decisions if they feel that this will negatively affect their chances of electoral success.”⁵⁴

Political parties are the driving force behind the selection of candidates for national office in Ukraine, having nominated 4,150 of the 5,830 candidates in the 2019 parliamentary elections.⁵⁵ Party structures in the country are weak, temporary or non-existent beyond a national office. Party leadership tends to be dominated by men, many of whom are active in or have links to the business community, and decisions regarding candidate selection and placement on lists are made behind closed doors. These weak party structures, and an opaque and insular selection process, contribute to parties’ reliance on individual candidates accessing funding and resources in order to be nominated and campaign. A 2019 IFES gender assessment of political and public life in Ukraine found, “Most parties do not have internal structures to improve women’s participation, and women’s leadership in parties — at the national and local level — is lacking. None of the major parties included any language on gender equality in their platforms or as part of their ideology.”⁵⁶

While a number of political party representatives of both genders interviewed for this paper stated that voters prefer men over women as candidates, public opinion data does not support this perception. The 2019 elections took place against a backdrop of increasing public support for women and special measures to further bolster their representation. In two IFES public opinion surveys after the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections, 18 percent of respondents opposed temporary special measures, such as quotas, while 62 percent supported such measures after the presidential election,⁵⁷ increasing to 65 percent after the parliamentary election.⁵⁸

The 2019 IFES surveys found that support for women candidates over men *increased* between elections. This disconnect between public opinion and the beliefs within political parties that the public prefers men as candidates implies that discrimination against women takes place during candidate selection by the parties themselves, not at the polling station. Political parties’ ingrained bias against women candidates may be due in part to a belief that they are less able to self-fund their campaigns — a belief substantiated by a number of interviewees. One candidate expressed a belief that women’s lack of access to funding could impact their effectiveness as candidates. Another stated that she believed a ban on political advertising, due to its high cost, would likely result in more women running for office. These observations are in line with findings in the literature that candidate nomination is one of the “two stages in particular where money directly impacts on women candidates” (the other being the election campaign itself).⁵⁹

The candidate selection process can be of crucial importance for women’s electoral prospects — but can pose a significant financial hurdle for participation.⁶⁰ One woman interviewed proposed a number of women

as candidates to the leadership of her party but remarked that less qualified men were ultimately selected. Another noted that “men occupy leadership positions and constitute the majority of party members.”

Even if women are members of party leadership, some decisions emerge in settings such as saunas, where men and women are separated.⁶¹ Several parties have in recent years established women’s wings or internal party quotas. However, these remain largely separate from party platforms or campaign messaging,⁶² with little done to target women although they make up 54 percent of the Ukrainian population. Even when a party has a women’s wing, it often has little influence in the party’s executive decision-making.

In the 2019 parliamentary elections, women were placed in largely unfavorable positions to win seats, even if a political party met the national threshold for seat allocation. Even for the six parties in which women made up over 30 percent of their lists overall (SN, OPFL, Civic Position, Batkivshchina, Power and Honor, and Samopomich), only Samopomich placed over 30 percent of women in the top half of its list. The first half of the SN party list included only 11 percent women, and women made up only 16 percent of single-member constituency candidates.

The 2019 elections took place during a period of feminist backlash, which impacted women’s portrayal in media. A vocal far-right minority (colloquially referred to as the anti-gender movement) received high-profile press coverage, occasionally eliciting responses from those in elected office. The anti-gender movement in Ukraine is organized and well-resourced; its methods include counter-protests, media campaigns, threats of violence and propaganda that aims to discredit women’s rights and feminists in particular.⁶³

Although the available data indicates that women nominated as candidates for the larger political parties raised more money than men on average, they were often disadvantaged in the candidate nomination process. As noted in the introduction, the significant increase of women in Parliament through the 2019 elections has multiple causes including, importantly, the meteoric rise of the SN party.

Conclusion

This paper shows a clear link between political finance and gender equality in Ukraine, although the link is multi-faceted, not necessarily the same for all women and can depend heavily on political party association. While candidates themselves did not immediately view gender as a formative aspect of their campaign experience (“I see no big differences in challenges for men and women” was a fairly typical answer to a direct interview question), their responses to more extensive questioning contributed to an overall understanding of how political finance reflects the fact that there are still four men for every woman member of the Ukrainian Parliament.

The financial reports submitted by single-member constituency (SMC) candidates and interviews conducted for this paper reflect significant differences in the ways that women and men candidates raise funds. The findings that women received less in corporate donations and contributed less of their own funds (and normally have less money to contribute), but relied more on donations from individuals, are in line with existing literature on this subject.⁶⁴

However, a surprising finding is that the official data indicates that total campaign income, and spending, was higher for women SMC candidates from the major parties in the 2019 parliamentary elections than for their men counterparts.⁶⁵

These findings challenge certain existing ideas for reform. The IFES report on the 2019 presidential elections noted that “[r]esearch from UNDP and others indicate that increased spending and contributions by wealthy donors can have an adverse impact on the representation of women in elected office; the more campaigning costs, the fewer women have the resources to compete on a level playing field with men.”⁶⁶ While much of the research presented above supports this notion, it also found that women candidates from the main parties raised and spent more than their men counterparts. This may relate to research elsewhere, such as Brazilian studies which found that access to resources is more important to the electoral success of women candidates, especially non-incumbents.⁶⁷ Similarly, research in Canada indicates that women candidates outspend their men counterparts by 10 percent.⁶⁸ This paper therefore adds to information that counters the notion that “[c]apping the amount that candidates can spend is [...] posited to have a direct effect on women’s ability to run successful campaigns.”⁶⁹ *It is far from certain that introducing limits on fundraising (or spending) would necessarily support increased gender equality in Ukrainian elections.*

The male-dominated business community and the perception within political parties of women as less financially self-sufficient is stressed in our findings as sources of challenges for women’s nomination for winnable positions, or nomination at all. This supports the finding that, globally, “there has been a growing recognition that politics dominated by money is, more often than not, politics dominated by men.”⁷⁰ In this regard, “money” is a more complex concept than cash alone, and women may be disadvantaged by the fact that they “have access to fewer resources than men to support their campaigns, such as external funding ... networks of influence, role models, and experienced mentors.”⁷¹

Recommendations

Given the complexity of the link between gender and political finance, no single solution can ensure equal financial opportunities for women and men in Ukrainian elections and politics in general. Efforts by different stakeholders are needed, and these efforts should be directed at both ensuring higher transparency and better oversight within the overall political finance framework and creating positive incentives, including financial, for women to enter politics, become candidates and raise and spend funds for campaigning in a way that will make them credible competitors.

Listed below are several key recommendations for legal and behavioral reforms that could contribute to a level playing field for men and women and eliminate major obstacles that women face.

For the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

- Simplify the procedures for donations to party and candidate accounts for all types of elections, including local elections;
- Consider limiting the most expensive types of campaigning, such as TV and outdoor advertising;
- Provide oversight agencies with necessary mandates and resources to control campaign finance and identify contraventions of donation and transparency rules; and
- Consider earmarking a certain share of public funding allocated to political parties for promoting women's political participation.

For the National Agency on Corruption Prevention and the Central Election Commission

- Establish coordination ahead of elections to ensure effective division of oversight responsibilities;
- Improve the monitoring and analysis of candidates' and parties' election financial reporting to focus on serious violations of campaign finance rules; and
- Collect gender-disaggregated data on the financing of parties and candidates, and consider ways to facilitate level playing fields for men and women candidates using state oversight tools.

For Political Parties

- Ensure equal chances for nominations in winnable positions for men and women candidates in all types of elections;
- Establish financial and other incentives for women to become candidates in elections and hold leadership positions within party structures;
- Consider allocating funds that can be used to support women's election campaigns; and
- Develop and implement initiatives aimed at supporting women politicians and improving their leadership, communication and fundraising skills.

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